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Water lines installed in Waukegan Harbor nearly 80 years ago will be replaced in what boosters call a critical step in revitalizing the lakefront.

The twin 24-inch pipes carry most of the daily flow of water to Waukegan, Beach Park, Park City and Green Oaks. They will be replaced with two 30-inch pipes that will be installed about 10 feet deeper to allow the entrance to the harbor to be dredged.

"You're going to see the beginning of the end of cleaning up Waukegan Harbor," said U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk in an announcement at the Waukegan Yacht Club overlooking the site.

"This is huge," agreed Jean "Susie" Schreiber, chairman of the Waukegan Harbor Citizens' Advisory Group.

That dredging is a prelude to a final cleanup of the inner harbor and is regarded by Kirk and Waukegan officials as the key to the redevelopment of 1,600 acres of Lake Michigan waterfront area as a place to live and play.

"People want to live near a recreational space next to a harbor," Kirk said. "This is not pie in the sky. This is already happening in Wisconsin, in Racine and Kenosha."

Cleaning the harbor and subsequent investment would have a ripple effect in the city and Lake County, Kirk said. Improvements could increase Waukegan home values by as much as \$53,000 each and hike property values throughout the county by more than \$800 million.

Waukegan Mayor Richard Hyde said condominiums on the north portion of the harbor, including the site of a defunct power plant, could add up to 10,000 people to the city.

That 36-acre parcel has been cleaned up, "which means it can be developed right now," Hyde said. The city expects to issue requests for proposals on that property by February.

Kirk secured congressional funding of \$1.4 million for the water line replacement, expected to be complete next summer, and \$2.6 million for the dredging to follow. The news is another piece in a 25-year effort to clean up a harbor that had been ringed by industry and contaminated with polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs.

The harbor was listed as one of the first priorities under the federal Superfund law in 1980 and was designated as a Great Lakes "area of concern" by the International Joint Commission. Kirk and others say the planned dredging would improve the environment and prompt economic development.

"Our hope is to be the third harbor in American cleaned up by the Great Lakes Legacy Act," Kirk said. The Great Lakes Legacy Act of 2002 authorized \$270 million in federal funding for the cleanup of 31 areas of concern.

The money designated for dredging must be used within two years or it will "disappear" Kirk said.

In Waukegan, high levels of PCBs already have been cleaned up, but additional work is needed to clear hot spots and bring the entire harbor into compliance with revised federal standards. When that might happen is unknown; a suitable site to dump the dredged material is being sought.

"It is the first step, but I'm not going to tell you it will be easy," said Col. Gary Johnston of the Army Corps of Engineers. "Some of us may never see the end results, but we can get started on it."